

The Hoodies Are Back

The peregrines have returned to their favourite nesting place – Lincoln Cathedral!

Words: Steve Lovell Photographs: RSPB

With their slate grey plumage and their distinctive black hoods, Lincoln's peregrines have returned to breed at Lincoln Cathedral this spring. Even if you have not seen them you will have heard them whilst walking around Minster Yard in Lincoln. They are extremely vocal when in their breeding territory, having an extensive range of kek-kek-kek calls along with other hacking and whistling notes.

Following on from last year's success when three chicks were reared, the female is now sat on eggs so we all wait in anticipation.

The Lincoln story represents a remarkable turnaround in the peregrine's fortunes - shot in large numbers during the Second World War for intercepting carrier pigeons, which could have been carrying important messages. Their next challenge was a population crash in the 1960's due to the effect of organochlorine compounds getting into the food chain. Being a top predator, the results were shocking, resulting in brittle egg shells and very few young peregrines taking to the skies.

Since that time numbers have recovered well with the complete ban of these compounds. However, the threat still remains in the form of persecution from poisoning, shooting and egg collectors. These are problems not just facing the peregrine but other birds of prey, so the RSPB uses situations like Lincoln to raise public awareness. This also links in well with their 'Stop Birds of Prey Persecution' campaign. After all, these top predators are key indicators of what is happening out there in the



wider world of nature.

Just recently, four buzzards were shot in the Folkingham area of Lincolnshire and another one was killed in an illegal pole trap at Odder near Lincoln. A sad end for such magnificent birds which are once again gracing the skies of Lincolnshire. At one point last year it would have been possible to see ten species of raptor within an hour's drive of Lincoln with Montagu's harrier and osprey being the star attractions after the Lincoln peregrines.

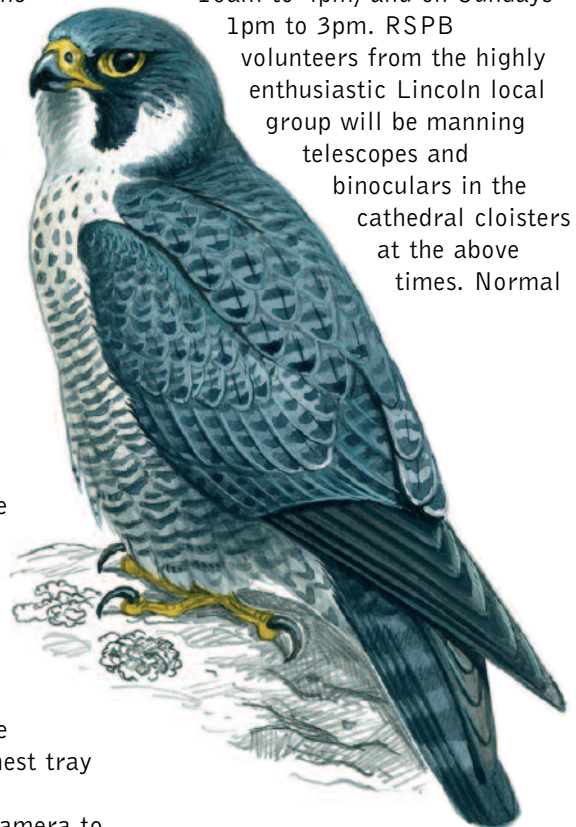
Anyway, back to Lincoln. The first peregrine was seen around the cathedral in the mid 1990's, where it was living up to its name of peregrinus, meaning the wanderer. It finally took up residence at this wonderful medieval building which resembled a cliff face, its more traditional home, but with one distinct advantage, a ready made supply of food in the form of feral pigeons. Sightings became more frequent and the rest is history. The pair bonded, mated and created the spectacle for avid wildlife watchers last summer.

So where are we now in 2008? As the birds didn't use the nest box which had been provided for them on the east side of the tower, the solution seemed to be a nest tray on the south side, this in conjunction with a nest camera to

record any nest activity would be the way forward. Nature being nature and peregrines being peregrines resulted in them laying their eggs at the far end of the ledge. As this article goes to print a licence has been obtained to relocate the camera so that nest footage can be recorded.

This project is being run by the RSPB as an event in their 'Aren't Birds Brilliant' campaign, where they aim to show and enthuse people about some spectacular wildlife moments. This would not have been possible without the support of the Cathedral so it is hoped that architecture, birds and people prove to be a great combination in 2008.

The project is running through June on Fridays and Saturdays, 10am to 4pm, and on Sundays 1pm to 3pm. RSPB volunteers from the highly enthusiastic Lincoln local group will be manning telescopes and binoculars in the cathedral cloisters at the above times. Normal





peregrines from their information watchpoint in the Minster Yard. These will be at 11am and 2pm on each day of the project.

The RSPB will also have a stand in Lincoln city centre at the Waterside or the Cornhill on 20th - 22nd June. Call in and have a chat to find out what is happening.

For further information contact: Project Officer Steve Lovell on 01522 689456 / 07957 618684 or Lincoln RSPB Group Leader Peter Skelson on 01522 695747 or visit www.rspb.org.uk/brilliant

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling problems that threaten our environment, Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

PEREGRINE FACTS AND FIGURES

Habitat: Rocky coastal cliffs, inland crags increasingly moving eastwards and using tall buildings, cathedrals, churches, silos

Current status: Approximately 1500 pairs which are supplemented by continental migrants in winter. This represents 20% of the European population.

Food: Wide range of birds from starling size up to wood pigeon. Taken in flight in the 'stoop' at speeds of up to 160mph.

Cathedral charges apply for entry. Recorded camera footage will also be available for you to view at this location.

It is an absolute honour for me to be the officer for this project as it represents an opportunity to promote stunning birds on what I believe to be one of the most incredible buildings in Europe right here in my home city. These

peregrines obviously have immaculate taste.

The more we lose the natural world around us the more we need the bits we have left, so it is heartening to see wild creatures coming into our domain just to give us a glimpse of their world.

Also on the above dates the RSPB will be running a series of free informative walks to view the

